

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-05 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00
INR-10 NSAE-00 DODE-00 L-03 /053 W
-----090552 222143Z /64
P 221542Z MAR 78
FM AMCONSUL HAMILTON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2728
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
POLAD CINCLANT 02

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 HAMILTON 00134

E.O. 11652: XGDS
TAGS: PINT, MILI, BD
SUBJECT: MEMCON OF DISCUSSION WITH PREMIER

1. EUR/NE OFFICE DIRECTOR FUNSETH AND I CALLED ON PREMIER DAVID GIBBONS IN HIS CABINET OFFICE MORNING OF MARCH 15. FOLLOWING IS GIST OF OUR DISCUSSION ON BROAD RANGE OF SUBJECTS WITH EMPHASIS ON WHAT IS EMERGING AS PRINCIPAL BILATERAL ISSUE IN OUR RELATIONS WITH GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA.

2. INDEPENDENCE. GIBBONS CONFIRMED THAT A SIZEABLE MAJORITY OF BERMUDIANS SHARED HIS GOVERNMENT'S VIEW THAT BERMUDA IS NOT PREPARED FOR INDEPENDENCE NOR IS THERE ANY COMPELLING REASON TO RUSH TOWARD THAT STATUS AT THIS TIME. HE RE-CAPPED THE RESULTS OF GOB'S PUBLICATION OF THE GREEN PAPER ON INDEPENDENCE, PUBLIC REACTION AND RESULTS OF INFORMAL POLLS TAKEN AFTER PUBLICATION. HE STATED THAT WERE A PUBLIC REFERENDUM HELD ON THE QUESTION NOW THE RESULTS WOULD LIKELY DISCLOSE THAT TWO-THIRDS OF THE BERMUDA ELECTORATE WERE OPPOSED TO INDEPENDENCE AT THIS TIME. IN THE BROADER SENSE HE REALIZES THAT INCREASING PRESSURES FROM THE OPPOSITION PARTY AND EVENTUALLY A RESURGENCE OF PRESSURES FROM THE BRITISH FOREIGN OFFICE WILL INEVITABLY REQUIRE BERMUDA TO BECOME INDEPENDENT. HE STATED THAT IN CONNECTION

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WITH A PLANNED VOTER REGISTRATION DRIVE IN EARLY JUNE, HIS UNITED BERMUDA PARTY WILL DO A HOUSE TO HOUSE CANVAS ON CURRENT SENTIMENT ON THE ISSUE OF INDEPENDENCE. HE CLAIMED THAT EVEN CONCEDED THE HARD CORE PLP MEMBERS WHO WILL NOT BE CANVASSED AND A SMALL SEGMENT OF THE UNAFFILIATED ELECTORATE, THAT THE RESULTS OF THE CANVAS WILL CONFIRM AT LEAST A 60 PERCENT MAJORITY OPPOSED TO INDEPENDENCE NOW.

THAT BEING THE CASE, HIS PARTY WILL GO INTO THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION IN 1980-81 ON A PRINCIPAL PLATFORM ISSUE OPPOSED TO EARLY INDEPENDENCE.

3. GIBBONS STATED THAT THE COSTS TO BERMUDA OF INDEPENDENCE AS SET FORTH IN THE GREEN PAPER WERE TOO CONSERVATIVE AND THAT SEVERAL MATERIAL QUESTIONS REMAINED UNANSWERED, I.E., ARRANGEMENTS FOR EXTERNAL DEFENSE, DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR REPRESENTATION AND SOME ASPECTS CONCERNED WITH THE ISLAND'S INTERNAL SECURITY. IN THIS REGARD, THE PREMIER REITERATED WHAT THE GOVERNOR HAD INFORMED US REGARDING PLANS TO BOLSTER THE ISLAND'S INTERNAL SECURITY SELF-SUFFICIENCY. HE INFORMED US THAT THE GOVERNOR HAD INITIATED SOME PRELIMINARY INQUIRIES THROUGH THE BRITISH MILITARY ATTACHE IN WASHINGTON REGARDING US-BASED TRAINING FOR THE 300 MAN BERMUDA REGIMENT. HE ASKED THAT FUNSETH AND CONGEN SUPPORT THE GOVERNOR'S REQUEST, AS HE WAS PARTICULARLY ANXIOUS TO MOVE THE LOCALE OF THE REGIMENT'S ANNUAL TRAINING EXERCISE FROM THE CARIBBEAN TO THE UNITED STATES. HE STATED THREE PRINCIPAL REASONS FOR REQUEST WERE THAT LOGISTICAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY JAMAICANS WAS INADEQUATE, THAT JUNGLE TERRAIN WHERE EXERCISES ARE HELD WAS INAPPROPRIATE FOR THE BERMUDA SCENE AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, HE FELT THAT GOB RISKED GREAT CONTAMINATION OF LOCAL FORCES BY ANNUAL EXPOSURE TO JAMAICAN MILITARY AND GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL. PREMIER STATED THAT GOB ASSUMES COSTS OF TRANSPORT FOR REGIMENT AND PROVIDES THEM WITH A PER DIEM.

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4. SEPARATE MEMCON OF DISCUSSION WITH GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN FOR LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PLOWMAN WILL DETAIL CURRENT STATUS OF LONG-STANDING NEGOTIATIONS CONCERNING RETURN OF SOME LANDS HELD BY US UNDER LEASE BASES AGREEMENT OF 1941. A KEY FACTOR IN DEADLOCK OF THESE NEGOTIATIONS HAS BEEN

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-----090568 222143Z /64

P 221542Z MAR 78
FM AMCONSUL HAMILTON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2729
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S E C R E T SECTION 02 OF 02 HAMILTON 00134

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OUR INSISTANCE THAT IN ADDITION TO GOB ASSUMING CONTROL AND RESPONSIBILITY OVER SOME LANDS AND ROADS MORE IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN THAN IN USG DEFENSE INTERESTS, THAT GOB ALSO TAKE OVER RESPONSIBILITY FOR OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE OF LONGBIRD BRIDGE, WHICH PROVIDES THE SOLE LINK BETWEEN ST. DAVID'S ISLAND AND THE BERMUDA MAINLAND. LONGBIRD IS A SWING-TYPE BRIDGE THAT PROVIDES ONLY ACCESS FROM CASTEL HARBOUR TO OPEN SEA. ACCESS AS PRESENTLY PROVIDED IS CLEAR US OBLIGATION UNDER LEASED BASES AGREEMENT. LONGBIRD ALSO PROVIDES ONLY ACCESS TO BERMUDA'S CIVIL AIR TERMINAL AND TO TOWN OF ST. GEORGE'S. FREQUENT BREAKDOWNS IN BRIDGE'S FUNCTIONING IS SENSITIVE ISSUE HERE AND ALWAYS GARNERS PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA COMMENTS LOCALLY. DURING PAST INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS ON GENERAL SUBJECT OF LEASE-BACK OF LANDS, ETC., GOB OFFICIALS HINTED THAT THE DESIRABLE SOLUTION WOULD BE FOR USG TO EVENTUALLY REPLACE THE TROUBLESOME SWING BRIDGE WITH A FIXED SPAN BRIDGE THAT WOULD ASSURE PERMANENT UNINTERRUPTED ACCESS TO THE AIRPORT AND OUTLYING AREAS. IT IS APPARENT THAT WITHIN PAST TWO WEEKS THE CABINET GROUP WHICH HAS BEEN CHARGED WITH INQUIRING INTO THE ENTIRE
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SUBJECT MATTER OF THESE ONGOING DISCUSSIONS, HAS DECIDED TO PRESSURE USG INTO ACCEPTING IN PRINCIPLE THE EVENTUAL REPLACEMENT OF THE PRESENT STRUCTURE WITH A FIXED SPAN BRIDGE.

5. IN OUR DISCUSSION WITH THE PREMIER, IT BECAME OBVIOUS THAT HE HAD BEEN PRIMED AND THAT HE TOOK ADVANTAGE OF FUNSETH'S PRESENCE TO SET FORTH IN DETAIL THE POLITICAL SENSITIVITIES AND PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES THAT MIGHT RESULT FROM THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO ACHIEVE SUCCESSFUL RESOLUTION OF THE BRIDGE ISSUE. HE STATED POINTELY THAT
1) PRESENT UBP GOVERNMENT HAS 25-15 MAJORITY IN HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY; 2) THAT CONSTITUENCIES EAST OF THE BRIDGE HAVE FOUR UBP MEMBERS IN THE HOUSE AND THAT ALL FOUR UBP SEATS ARE MARGINAL; 3) THAT OPPOSITION PARTY COULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF PRESENT GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO OBTAIN SATISFACTORY

RESOLUTION OF BRIDGE PROBLEM AND CONVERSELY THAT SHOULD USG CONSTRUCT A FIXED SPAN BRIDGE IT WOULD ASSIST UBP IN MAINTAINING CONTROL OF GOVERNMENT IN NEXT GENERAL ELECTION. GIBBONS THEN WENT ON TO STATE THAT WITH UBP GOVERNMENT AT TIME OF INDEPENDENCE, NO FURTHER CONCESSIONS OR MATERIAL AMENDMENTS TO THE CURRENT LEASE AGREEMENT WILL BE REQUESTED.

6. THE ABOVE POINTS WERE MADE SUCCINCTLY AND WITHOUT ANY REFERENCE TO ACTUAL USG OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE LEASED BASES AGREEMENT. HE WAS INFORMING THE USG THAT THESE WERE POLITICAL REALITIES FACING THE UBP ON THIS SMALL ISLAND AND THAT IF THE USG FELT THAT ITS INTERESTS WOULD BE BETTER PROTECTED WITH THE UBP AT THE HELM OF GOVERNMENT AT THE TIME BERMUDA EMERGED AS AN INDEPENDENT NATION, THEN WE SHOULD GIVE SERIOUS THOUGHT TO CONSTRUCTION OF THIS VITAL SPAN.

7. COMMENT: CONSTRUCTION OF A FIXED SPAN BRIDGE AND NECESSARY APPROACHES IS, BY VERY INEXACT ESTIMATE A 3 TO 4 MILLION DOLLAR ITEM. IN THE SEVERAL INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS
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HELD OVER THE PAST YEAR AND A HALF ON THE ENTIRE QUESTION OF RETURN OF SOME LEASED LAND, ETC., ONLY OCCASIONAL LIP-SERVICE WAS GIVEN TO THE QUESTION OF SUCH A STRUCTURE. CURRENT GOB ASSESSMENTS OF THE POTENTIAL POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE TO OBTAIN US AGREEMENT TO BUILD THE BRIDGE ARE REALISTIC BUT EXAGGERATED. I AGREE THAT GOB ASSUMPTION OF RESPONSIBILITY TO OPERATE AND MAINTAIN THE BRIDGE SUCH AS WE HAD BEEN PRESSING FOR IN PAST DISCUSSIONS COULD PRESENT REAL POLITICAL LIABILITIES FOR GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, IF AGREEMENT IS REACHED ON RETURN OF SOME UNUSED LANDS THAT ARE PART OF THE AGREEMENT IN EXCHANGE FOR GOB RELIEVING THE USG OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAINTAINING SOME ROADS AND CAUSEWAYS THAT ARE OF NO US DEFENSE INTEREST, COUPLED WITH OUR AGREEMENT TO CONTINUE MAINTENANCE TO THE PRESENT SWING BRIDGE, I THEN CONSIDER THAT THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES IN THE CONSTITUENCIES EAST OF THE BRIDGE WOULD BE SUBSTANTIALLY MITIGATED. ON THE OTHER HAND, WITH THE PROBABILITY OF INDEPENDENCE IN 6 TO 8 YEARS AND IN VIEW OF THE OFFICIAL GOB (AND UK) POSITION THAT AN INDEPENDENT BERMUDA WOULD HAVE THE OPTION TO RENEGOTIATE THE LEASED BASES AGREEMENT (ITEMS 48-50 OF THE GREEN PAPER ON INDEPENDENCE), IT IS OBVIOUS THAT CONSTRUCTION OF THE FIXED SPAN BRIDGE WOULD CLEARLY BE A DEMAND OF THE GOB, WHATEVER PARTY WERE IN POWER. IT IS CLEARLY IN USG INTERESTS THAT BERMUDA BECOME INDEPENDENT UNDER THE AEGIS OF THE UBP, AND A US COMMITMENT TO BUILD SUCH A STRUCTURE WOULD CLEARLY BE A PLUS ON THE UBP POLITICAL LEDGER. WE SHOULD THEREFORE LOOK AT THE LONGER RANGE LOCAL POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCESSIONS WE WOULD INEVITABLY HAVE TO MAKE AT THE TIME OF INDEPENDENCE AND SERIOUSLY CONSIDER THE GOB REQUEST. AS

MORE DETAILED INFORMATION HAS BEEN TRANSMITTED BY THE
COMMANDING OFFICER, NAS, THROUGH DOD CHANNELS, IT IS
SUGGESTED THAT AT SOME EARLY DATE THE DEPARTMENT DISCUSS
ALL ASPECTS OF THIS REQUEST AT ONE OF ITS REGULAR INTER-
AGENCY MEETINGS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 22 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978HAMILT00134
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: DG ALTERED PER 78 HAMILTON 149
Executive Order: X3
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780126-1067
Format: TEL
From: HAMILTON
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780339/aaaabgib.tel
Line Count: 238
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 506ac1bf-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3242648
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MEMCON OF DISCUSSION WITH PREMIER
TAGS: PINT, MILI, BD, US, (GIBBONS, DAVID)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/506ac1bf-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014